

<b>Subject:</b>	Rossendale Council and Neighbourhood Forum Grants 2015/16 and 2016/17	<b>Status:</b>	For Publication
<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet	<b>Date:</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> November 2014
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Business	<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Leader of the Council and Communities and Partnerships
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	Required:	Yes	Attached: Yes
<b>Biodiversity Impact Assessment</b>	Required:	No	Attached: No
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1.	<b>RECOMMENDATION(S)</b>
1.1	That Cabinet supports the allocation of £60,000 funding each year in 2015-16 and 2016-17 for Rossendale Council Grants and Neighbourhood Forum Grants. This to comprise £45,000 for Rossendale Council Grants and £15,000 for Neighbourhood Forum Grants
1.2	That Cabinet supports the commencement of a grants application process for the allocation of 2 year Rossendale Council Grants following the principles and criteria agreed in 2014/15 - targeted funding to support financial inclusion services.
1.3	All future minor amendments to the grants process to be delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To make recommendations for the allocation of Rossendale Council Grants and Neighbourhood Forum grants in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

## 3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **Regenerating Rossendale:** This priority focuses on regeneration in its broadest sense, so it means supporting communities that get on well together, attracting sustainable investment, promoting Rossendale, as well as working as an enabler to promote the physical regeneration of Rossendale.
  - **Responsive Value for Money Services:** This priority is about the Council working collaboratively, being a provider, procurer and a commissioner of services that are efficient and that meet the needs of local people.

## 4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:
- 4.2 Not issuing grant funding via robust, open and transparent criteria could open the process to challenge by those making or wishing to make an application.
- 4.3 The grant funding criteria is designed to ensure that councillors have information which will support responsible financial management through the allocation of grant funding against the Council's agreed criteria of allocating target funding to support financial inclusion services.

## 5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 5.1 In 2013 Cabinet agreed to reduce the amount available for Rossendale Council Grant funding in

2014/15 to £60,000, to be focussed on the provision of grants for services to facilitate financial inclusion in Rossendale, to be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process to reflect the serious financial pressures the Council is experiencing. The previous general grants pot concluded in March 2014. Extensive consultation was undertaken prior to this decision and a full Equality Impact Assessment was completed.

5.2 In addition Cabinet agreed that a total of £20,000 be allocated to support the continuation of Neighbourhood Forum Grants in 2014-15, funded via Director's Reserves and reviewed annually.

5.3 An amended grant allocation process and criteria was approved by Cabinet in November 2013 for the allocation of Rossendale Council Grants. The application process targeted funding on financial inclusion services whilst retaining the principles of an open, robust and transparent process. The criteria for applications included:

- *Applicants must be Rossendale based constituted third sector organisations, or third sector organisations that carry out work in Rossendale, that provide services that facilitate financial inclusion*
- *Applicants must be able to demonstrate a track record of working in partnership to deliver services to Rossendale residents which support the aims of the Rossendale Financial Inclusion Group, which are – ‘To improve financial inclusion in the Borough through a more co-ordinated approach to debt recovery, access to welfare benefits, access to financial services, prevention of problem debt and the provision of money advice’.*
- *Applicants must have demonstrable experience of working with Rossendale residents and have local knowledge of the issues facing the different communities within the Borough.*

5.4 Two applications were received from Rossendale Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Rossendale Credit Unions. Both applications met the stated criteria. In April 2014 CAB was subsequently awarded a 1 year grant of £48,000 towards their core service and Credit Unions a 1 year grant of £12,000 towards the costs associated with a development worker to promote the service and encourage new members.

5.5 As the grant allocation was for one year, to be reviewed annually, it is necessary to review the grants allocation from April 2015.

5.6 It is proposed that:

- Cabinet supports the allocation of £45,000 funding for Rossendale Council Grants and £15,000 funding for Neighbourhood Forum Grants in 2015-16 and 2016-17. This represents a reduction of £20,000 in the total grants allocation from April 2015.
- Cabinet supports the commencement of an open grants application process for the allocation of 2 year Rossendale Council Grants following the principles agreed in 2013 - targeted funding to support financial inclusion services.
- The same criteria and application form is used for the grants application process as in 2013/14, with the inclusion of an outcome relating to digital inclusion. Applications for Rossendale Council Grants will be invited from Tuesday December 9<sup>th</sup> with a closing date of Wednesday January 7<sup>th</sup>. This allows 4 weeks for organisations to complete an application and will enable a report to be prepared for February Cabinet making recommendations on grants to be awarded. Copies of the Explanation Form, Guidance

Notes and Grants Application Form are attached at Appendices 2-4.

- Responsibility for assessing the completed applications is delegated to officers in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and confirmed by Cabinet.
- The current application and decision making process for allocating Neighbourhood Forum Grants will continue.

5.7 It is envisaged that the proposed allocation of Rossendale Council Grant funding for financial inclusion services will enable the services to continue to be provided at their current level and, therefore, there will not be any negative or disproportionate impact on any protected equality groups as a result of implementing this policy decision.

#### **COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:**

#### **6. SECTION 151 OFFICER**

6.1 Financial matters are noted within the report.

#### **7. MONITORING OFFICER**

7.1 All relevant comments are contained in the body of the report.

#### **8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT**

8.1 Consultation meetings were held with both current recipients of Rossendale Council Grant funding in October 2014. It is envisaged that both organisations will have a reduced need for grant funding from 2015 -16 and 2016-17 as CAB have moved to Stubblee Hall and will therefore have reduced overheads and the Credit Unions development worker will have helped them in their aim to become independently financially sustainable through increase in membership, savings and their loan portfolio. In addition First Choice Credit Union and Mid Rossendale Credit Union are working towards a merger which will result in some reduction in costs.

8.2 From April - October 2014 only £5135.00 has been awarded in grants by the 4 Neighbourhood Forums, out of a total allocation of £20,000 for the financial year. Also, the future of the Neighbourhood Forums is uncertain following changes agreed by Cabinet in March 2014. A reduced grant allocation for the Neighbourhood Forums for 2015/16 and 2016/17 would provide grant funding during a transition period whilst also reflecting their changing role and reduction in the number of grant applications received. Neighbourhood Forum grants are not specifically targeted at any one specific protected equality group, therefore any reduction in grant funding to Neighbourhood Forums will not have a significant disproportionate impact on any protected equality groups.

8.3 An initial equality impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the development of the policy decision outlined in this report, which has been informed by the associated consultation activity – see Appendix 1. It is envisaged that the proposed level of funding will enable the services to continue at their current level should the current providers re apply / be successful and, therefore, it is determined that there is no significant evidence of any negative or disproportionate impact on any protected equality groups as a result of implementing this policy decision

#### **9 CONCLUSION**

9.1 Given the scale of the savings challenge which faces Rossendale Borough Council, it continues to be necessary to review the amount of grant funding that RBC gives to community groups and

other organisations. A total allocation of £45,000 for Rossendale Council Grants and £15,000 for Neighbourhood Forum Grants in 2015-16 and 2016-17 would enable the continuation of grants to support financial inclusion services at the current level and the continuation of small grant funding through the Neighbourhood Forums.

9.2 A two year funding agreement will enable grant recipients and the Neighbourhood Forums to have some continuity and to be able to forward plan.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Rossendale Council and Neighbourhood Forum Grants 23 October 2013	<a href="http://www.rossendale.gov.uk">www.rossendale.gov.uk</a>
Grants 2014-15 27 November 2013	<a href="http://www.rossendale.gov.uk">www.rossendale.gov.uk</a>
Allocation of Rossendale Council Grants 2014-15 19 March 2013	<a href="http://www.rossendale.gov.uk">www.rossendale.gov.uk</a>
Appendix 1 Equality Impact Assessment	Attached
Appendix 2 Rossendale Council Grants Explanation Notes	Attached
Appendix 3 Rossendale Council Grants Guidance Notes	Attached
Appendix 4 Rossendale Council Grants Application Form	Attached